



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

GEORGE J. PROAKIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 8 Medford Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2020-24

Applicant: Medford Properties, LLC

Owner: same as applicant

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: December 15, 2020



Staff Note: The demolition application for 8 Medford Street was submitted just days before the new Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) was signed into law. Therefore, 8 Medford Street falls under the OLD demolition review ordinance where the maximum delay period is 9 months. Further, the prior demolition review ordinance did not allow for public comment at the Historic Significance determination stage, only the Preferably Preserved stage of the process.

I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context 8 Medford Street is located in Boynton Yards on the city line with Cambridge East). Starting around the mid-19th century, Boynton Yards became a center of the slaughtering and meatpacking industry.

This area of Medford Street along with Gore, Warren, Horace, and Ward, among others, has been home to works of the meat packing plants that arose along the Millers River and the Fitchburg Railroad line in roughly the mid-19th century. The proximity of the rail lines, Boston wharves and Millers River made the

area convenient for the meatpacking industry and all of its ancillary functions – delivery and slaughter of animals, disposal of industry-related waste, and shipping of final product.

8 Medford Street is located directly opposite the sites of the former Charles H. North Packing Plant and the J.P. Squire Meat Packing Plant and slaughterhouse. Other nearby plants included New England Dressed Meat and Wool, the Boynton Meat Packing Company and other smaller industries including brickyards, glass-making companies, and furniture makers.

According to *Somerville, Massachusetts, A Brief History*, this area became heavily polluted as a result of industry practices. The Miller's River was turned into a "fetid mess" (55) due to the thousands of animal carcasses and waste dumped into its waters on a weekly basis. The tidal nature of the Miller's River would reveal the decaying bodies with each low tide, releasing putrid gasses into the air. (Morris & Martin, 55-56).

The situation in the area became so extreme that Somerville, under Mayor George Brastow, joined forces with Cambridge in requesting that the State Legislature force the slaughterhouse owners to remediate the issue. The ultimate resolution was that the Miller's River was filled in by the slaughterhouse owners (1874) and Somerville and Cambridge together constructed a trunk sewer in 1876.

The slaughterhouses gave the area a particular character that made it undesirable except for only the poorest and most recent immigrants to live there.

SQUIRE'S FAMOUS HAMS
Are Delicate and Delicious.

They make the daintiest sandwiches for teas and luncheons in the house or out-of-doors. Carefully cured, they keep moist, sweet and refreshing.

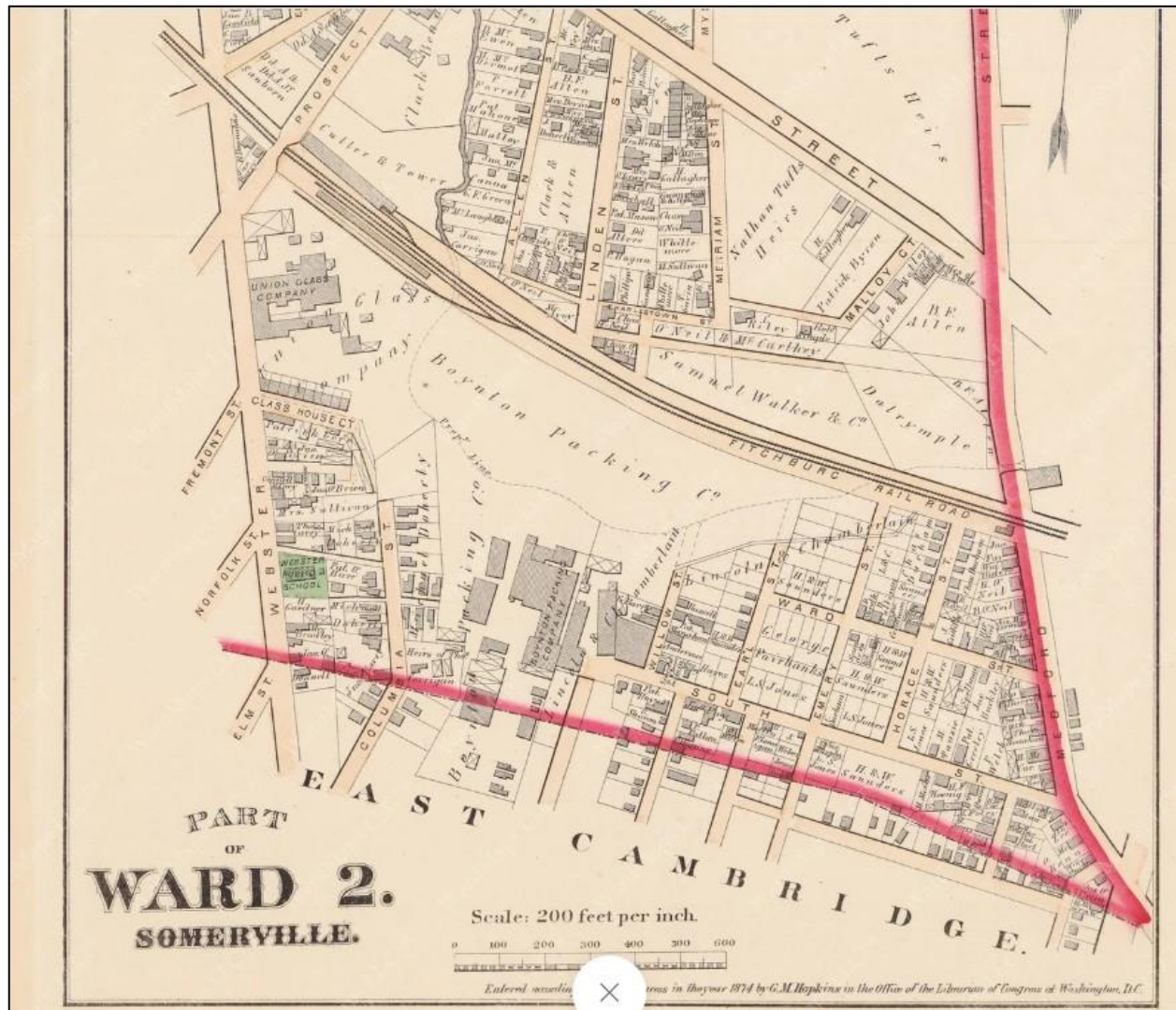
Our "ready-cooked hams" are a great convenience when you're away from home.

JOHN P. SQUIRE & CO., Boston.

Advertisement for John P. Squire and Company's Somerville-Cambridge slaughtering plant.

Above: An ad from J.P.Squire. Somerville, Massachusetts, A Brief History. p.54

The earliest map accessed to-date is the 1874 Hopkins Plate F, shown immediately below. The Charles North and J.P. Squire plants are located just off the bottom right portion of the map.



A close-up of this same 1874 Hopkins Plate F below shows that the parcel was owned by a James. O'Brien. At the time, this property had a Warren Street address (Warren Street being the street running immediately to the left of the property and intersecting with Medford/South Streets). Note the Boynton Packing Company on the Somerville side of the map, abutting the Fitchburg Railroad.



Left: Today's 8 Medford Street. Given the shape and location of the structure, Preservation Planning believes that it is the same structure that is present today.

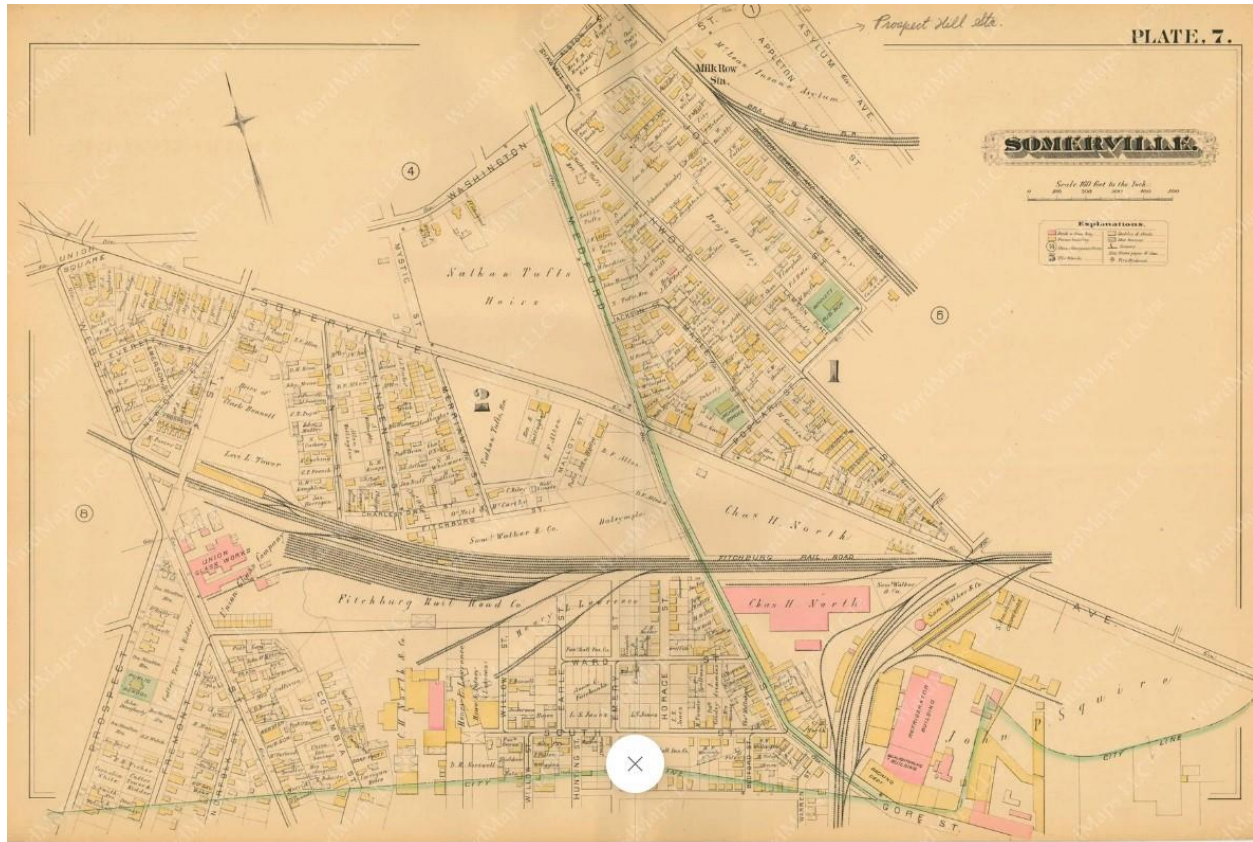
The 1880 Federal Census shows that James O'Brien still lived at this property, though it had a Warren Street address. O'Brien was employed as a cooper (barrel maker) and likely worked within very close proximity to his home. As noted earlier, due to the undesirable environmental conditions, this area of Somerville was home to the poorest and immigrants. It is noted that James O'Brien and his wife were immigrants themselves, having both been born in Ireland. He was 45 at the time of the 1880 census and it is noted that though he and his wife were born abroad, their two daughters were born in Massachusetts.

1880 United States Federal Census for James O'Brien Massachusetts > Middlesex > Somerville > 486																											
Name of Person		House Number		The Name of each Person whose place of birth, on the day of June, 1880, was in this family			Sex		Age		Relationship to head of family		Married within last year		Profession, Occupation or Trade of each person, male or female		Is the person (on the day of the Enumeration) still sick or convalescing, or so as to be unable to attend to ordinary business or duties? If so, what is the duration of disability?		Place of Birth of this person, and of the State or Territory of United States, or the Country, if of foreign birth		Place of Birth of the mother of this person, and of the State or Territory of United States, or the Country, if of foreign birth		Place of Birth of the father of this person, and of the State or Territory of United States, or the Country, if of foreign birth				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
1	122 180	James Michael	M	45	Father																						
2	123 184	James James	M	45																							
3		Elizabeth	F	42	Wife																						
4		Mary F	F	14	Daughter																						
5		Kenneth	M	7	Son																						
6	122 185	James James	M	21																							
7		Elizabeth	F	26	Wife																						
8		Mary E	F	2	Daughter																						
9		Agnes	F	12	Daughter																						
10	123 186	Elizabeth	F	30																							
11	124 187	James Michael	M	32																							
12		Elizabeth	F	23	Wife																						
13		William	M	11	Son																						
14		Elizabeth	F	10	Daughter																						
15		William	M	7	Son																						

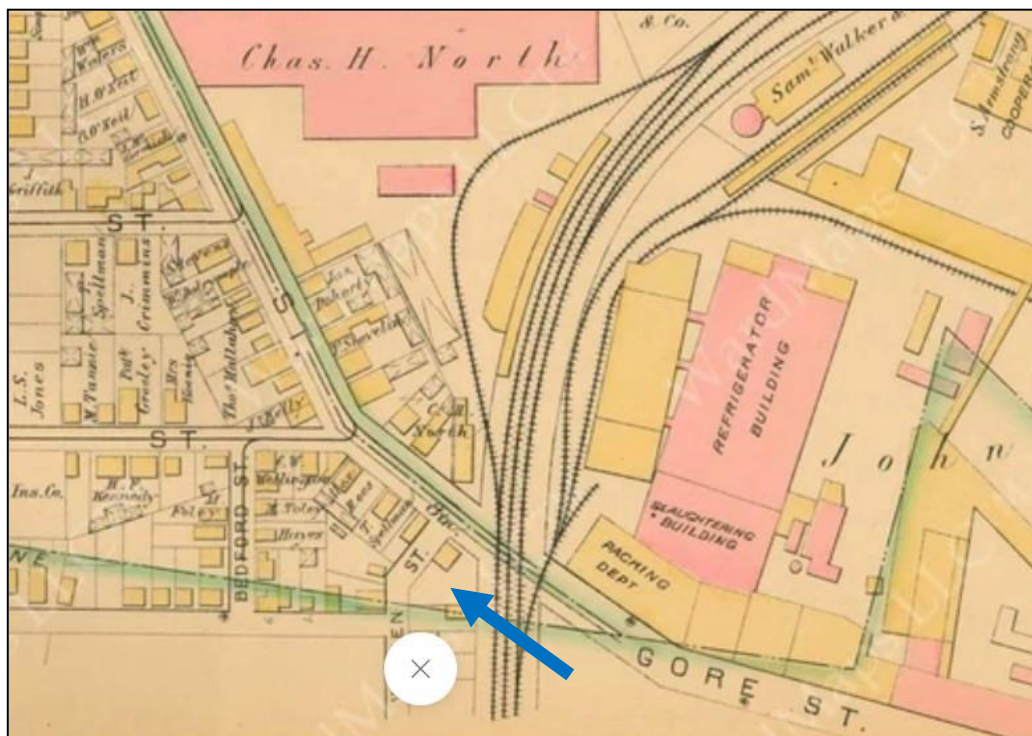
Given the nature of the location of the property (its surroundings), and the immigrant and economically-challenged circumstances of the population, it is likely that O'Brien rented rooms or floors of this building to other area workers and their families.

The 1884 Hopkins Plate 7 shows the parcel as it was on the 1874 map. The parcel remains the same size and the building remains the same without any additions. The yellow color of the building on this map confirms that it is a wood-framed structure.

The first view of the 1884 map below shows the North and Squire slaughterhouses and meat packing plants directly across from 8 Medford Street. The subsequent view presents a close-up of the property and the immediately-surrounding parcels and industrial buildings.



In the close-up of the map below, the J.P. Squire plant is immediately across the street from 8 Medford Street.



The 20th Century saw the gradual influx of other businesses in the Boynton Yards area including salvage yards and auto-recyclers.

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

See the “integrity” section for a description of the building.

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

The period of relevance for the house begins at least in 1874 and possible earlier.

- a. Location: Based on map research, it is believed that the structure is in its original location
- a. Design: Three-story with flat roof. Square form. Deeply inset raised entry on the left front of the building. Interior clapboarding on inset entry.

Brick and concrete steps lead from public way (sidewalk) into building entry. These steps were likely originally wood.

The first floor façade likely presented three bays (entry and two double-hung, windows to its right). However, the original windows have been removed and two small, sliding, later 20th-century windows are installed in their place.

The second and third floor front facades each are three bays wide. The one-over-one replacement windows are possibly located in their original locations and are aligned with the bays on above and below.

The right elevation is five bays wide on the second and third floors. As with the front façade, these one-over-one replacement windows are aligned with their comrades above/below...with the exception of the first floor. The first floor window openings have likely been closed. Today, that first floor façade presents a late-20th century sliding window. There is another deeply-inset, clapboard-lined entry on the right elevation of the building. Later brick/concrete steps lead from the public way into the entry. It is likely that this and the front entry are the original entries to the building.

The left elevation façade presents a much more haphazard window arrangement with no symmetry or alignment. A left elevation entry is also present.

The rear elevation of the structure presents a later entry and another haphazard window arrangement. Likely several original windows have been covered up. It is likely that the

two windows on the right side of the rear elevation on both the second and third stories are in their original location.

A parapet is extant at the front and rear rooflines

The first story of the structure now presents brick facing and the second and third stories are vinyl sided.

- c. Materials: Wood frame; vinyl siding; vinyl windows; brick facing at street-level on front and right facades. Brick and concrete steps.
- d. Alterations: The property has been extensively altered. Windows have been closed up, brick facing and vinyl siding added and the original steps removed. All windows are modern day replacements. While most windows are double-hung, others are small, modern sliders.

Evaluation of Integrity: While the building retains integrity of the three-story, square form, the structure has been otherwise heavily altered such that it retains little relationship to the time period in which it gained its significance

III. FINDINGS

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (i) **importantly associated with people, events or history** and/or (ii) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i-ii). The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) must make these findings. The portions of the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) related to these findings are included below:*

A. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i

Importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 8 Medford Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 8 Medford Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “i”.

B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, ii

The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or

builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 8 Medford Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 8 Medford Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “ii”.

IV. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the structure at 8 Medford Street is or is not “historically significant”.